Deborah Husak

**Observation / Reflection #4: The Game of School**

In The Passionate Teacher, Ron Fried describes the Game of School (GOS) as what happens when teachers and students forsake intellectual work and instead engage in their classes as rituals. Take this opportunity to consider this chapter in light of some of the the other experiences that you've had this semester to answer at  
least three of the following questions:

* What elements of the game of school are you seeing in your placements?
* How have you seen teachers fight the game of school in their classes?
* What features can you plan into your units that might discourage the GOS?
* Finally, what impact will this description of the GOS have on your own approach to teaching as expressed in your teaching philosophy?

It is interesting to see the contrast between the college prep and accelerated biology classes. They are each playing the game of school in the ways predicted by Ron Fried in his chapter describing the Game of School but using different strategies. The accelerated biology students are prepared and carefully write down everything the teacher says. They frequently ask for clarification of directions and try to make sure they are doing everything properly. It is evident that they are very concerned about performing well. It is also concerning that they are so focused on pleasing the teacher that they seem less involved in questioning and reasoning through the content. They do not give the impression that they would be willing to challenge a theory or statement in class. They would rather write down the facts and memorize them and continue to do well. They are not risk takers. One accelerated student read his response in class to a question last week which was so well written and comprehensive the teacher and I were openly impressed. He immediately looked to his table apologetically and mumbled something as though he was afraid to appear as though he was showing off. The college prep class takes notes as directed in class but do not always follow every direction or include every detail. They do not appear interested in the content and, despite their notes; several have failed recent quizzes in class. They do not ask for clarification of instruction or content material which gives the impression that they are not motivated to perform well or learn the material.

I was able to be part of a conversation between my CT and another teacher who teaches college prep biology. They do not have adequate co-planning time and had to try to discuss improving their class between classes. My CT was concerned by the poor scores on recent quizzes and suggested that they devise an open note assessment to intrinsically motivate students to take better notes and allow them to evaluate their understanding of the concepts better by asking them to use that information to answer a higher level question. The students are studying carbohydrates, lipids and proteins and the question would require them to identify where each of those are found in a cheeseburger with all the trimmings (tomatoes, lettuce…) and how those will be incorporated into the body.

As I consider how I will teach in the future I will try to counter the tendency to fall into the patterns of the “game of school”. In accelerated classes with students who are motivated to please but afraid to take risks, I would have to challenge them with debatable issues and encourage them to take the content information and use it to support their opinions. I would try to provide opportunity to choose a topic to explore. I would have to ensure that students feel safe asking questions about content and presenting their own opinions. I would like to use groups or pairs to encourage the sharing of ideas. The accelerated students have the potential to be bright leaders of the future but they need to learn that their opinions matter. They can learn to be passionate and take risks in the science classroom. I believe the college prep students are more willing to take risks in the classroom and would try to get them involved in discussions that include making predictions and using the content to validate them. I would try to have many inquiry activities in the classroom and let them discover the facts rather than expecting them to be motivated to memorize the information they need because they are not intrinsically motivated to be high performers.